

Grantmaking Best Practices

The City of Alexandria's Office of the Arts administers an annual grant program to support eligible nonprofit arts organizations in delivering engaging, high-quality arts programming that benefits city residents. In addition to adhering to all City financial policies and regulations, the Office of the Arts is committed to aligning with industry best practices to ensure a fair, transparent, and equitable grantmaking process.

Fairness and Consistency

- Best practices require that all applicants be treated under the same published criteria and timelines.
- Removing an application after review can create a perception of bias or unfairness unless the same policy is applied to everyone.

Transparency

- Funders are expected to communicate rules in advance — including eligibility requirements, disqualification grounds, and review processes.
- If an application is removed post-review, the rationale should match a pre-stated policy (e.g., eligibility error discovered, conflict of interest, fraud).

Integrity of the Review Process

- Reviewers' scores are part of an official record; altering the pool afterward can undermine trust in the process.
- Most funders treat scoring as the final evaluation step, with disqualification happening *before* review unless something disqualifying comes to light later.

Generally, removing an application after it has already been reviewed and scored is not considered aligned with best practices in grantmaking — unless there's a clearly documented, policy-based reason and the process is transparent to all applicants.

Exceptions Where It's Acceptable

- Eligibility violation discovered after scoring (e.g., applicant was ineligible but that wasn't caught initially).
- Ethics/compliance breach (e.g., falsified information, plagiarism).
- Conflict of interest identified post-review that compromises fairness.

In these cases, best practice is to:

- Document the reason in writing.
- Apply the same action to all similarly situated applicants.
- Notify the applicant promptly and respectfully.